



NEWS RELEASE

FOREST HEIGHTS POLICE DEPARTMENT

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MS-13 Gang Leader Sentences to Life in Prison after being Convicted of Racketeering Offenses encompassing Murder.

Greenbelt, Maryland - U.S. District Judge Deborah K. Chasanow sentenced Roberto Antonio Argueta, a/k/a "Alex Antonio Cruz," a/k/a "Buda," age 29, of Hyattsville, Maryland, today to life in prison, plus an additional 35 years, for ordering the murder of Nancy Diaz and the attempted murder of another juvenile girl. A twelve-person federal jury voted today to impose a sentence of life in prison without parole on Argueta. On March 4, 2010, the same jury found Argueta guilty of conspiracy to commit murder in aid of a racketeering enterprise known as MS-13, conspiracy to participate in racketeering, murder in aid of racketeering, murder resulting from the use of a gun in a violent crime, two counts of assault with a dangerous weapon in aid of racketeering and two counts of using a gun during a violent crime.

The conviction and sentence were announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein; Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Criminal Division; Special Agent in Charge Theresa R. Stoop of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives - Baltimore Field Division; Chief Roberto L. Hylton of the Prince George's County Police Department; Special Agent in Charge Richard A. McFeely of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Special Agent in Charge William Winter of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; Chief J. Thomas Manger of the Montgomery County Police Department; and Chief Darien L. Manley of the Maryland National Capital Park Police.

According to testimony presented at the eight week trial, Argueta was a leader of the **Langley Park** Salvatruchos (LPS) clique of La Mara Salvatrucha, also known as MS-13, a gang composed primarily of immigrants or descendants of immigrants from El Salvador, with members operating throughout Prince George's County and Montgomery County, Maryland and elsewhere inside and outside of the United States.

Witnesses testified at trial that Argueta and other MS-13 gang members stabbed a rival gang member with broken bottles and knives, **outside nightclub in Langley Park**, Maryland on September 17, 2004. In October 2004, Argueta led a gang meeting in Prince George's County,

Maryland in which he and other gang members discussed plans to kill Nancy Diaz. The jury found, based on the evidence presented at trial and during the penalty phase, that Argueta Ordered the murder of Nancy Diaz. On October 25, 2004, two other MS-13 members drove Ms. Diaz and another juvenile female to the George Washington Cemetery in Adelphi, Maryland. According to testimony, another MS-13 member shot and killed Nancy Diaz, and shot the other girl in the face and stabbed her twice in the chest to attempt to make sure she was dead. The victim survived, and she later identified her assailants.

Israel Ernesto Palacios, also known as Homie, age 32, of Silver Spring, Maryland, was sentenced to life in prison for his role in the October 25, 2004 murder and attempted murder. James Guillen, also known as Toro, age 23, of Hyattsville, Maryland, who drove the MS-13 members and victims to the cemetery, pleaded guilty to racketeering conspiracy after a jury was selected for his federal trial, and was sentenced to 262 months in prison. One of the murderers of Nancy Diaz, Jeffrey Villatoro, was prosecuted in the Circuit Court of Prince George's County and received a life sentence. Another of the murderers, Jesus Canales, age 25, of Silver Spring, Maryland, pled guilty in federal court to RICO conspiracy, including the murder of Nancy Diaz. He has not yet been sentenced.

To date, this office has charged 51 MS-13 members with various federal offenses; 25 members have been convicted at trial or pled guilty to RICO charges and 19 have pleaded guilty to other charges, primarily immigration or gun violations. Four defendants have been sentenced to life in prison. One remaining defendant faces a capital trial beginning in June, 2010.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein and Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer praised the RAGE Task Force, and thanked Prince George's County State's Attorney Glenn F. Ivey and Montgomery County State's Attorney John McCarthy for the assistance that they and their offices provided.

Mr. Rosenstein and Mr. Breuer commended Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert K. Hur, Assistant U.S. Attorney James M. Trusty, currently on detail as Deputy Chief of the Criminal Division's Gang Unit, and Trial Attorney Laura J. Gwinn of the Criminal Division's Gang Unit, who prosecuted the case.

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